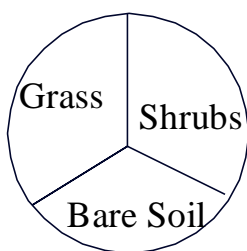




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 15 Issue 4 Winter 2016

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sports-people in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x5772 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

Managing “Odd” Areas for Big Benefits - Part 3 of 3: Lawns

David Hoover, Small Game Coordinator, Jefferson City

- *This is the final article in a 3-part series discussing ways in which managing “odd” areas on your property can yield productive wildlife habitat and compliment other habitat management efforts. Lawns, as American as baseball and apple pie, require the expenditure of an enormous amount of time and money. Money and time that could be spent doing something more productive and environmentally friendly.*

The American Lawn

Historically, lawns were reserved for European nobility; those that could afford the labor required to keep their “landscape gardens” manicured. They started to become popular in America in the late 19th century with the invention of the lawn mower. Today, an estimated 40 million acres of land are devoted to lawns. In fact, a recent study by NASA estimates that lawns are now the largest single ‘crop’ in the U.S.

Maintaining our lawns requires an enormous amount of time and money that could be spent in more productive ways. True, a well-manicured lawn does have a pleasing esthetic quality to it, but it is a biological desert. Also consider that as homeowners we apply more pesticides and fertilizers on a per acre basis than is applied on agricultural crops; the majority of which runoff into our water supply. Another astonishing number is that between 30 and 60 percent of the water supply, depending upon location, in urban areas is used on lawns.



Manicured urban lawns and small suburban acreages require enormous resources to maintain and are a biological “desert.”

Alternatives

If you are someone that thoroughly enjoys spending time maintaining your lawn and love the English manicured look, than you likely won't change a thing. However; if you are like me and lawn mowing and yard maintenance is one of your least favorite activities than there is hope. If you live in an urban neighborhood and have an "average" lot, consider landscaping with native plants. Establishing wildflower gardens – the bigger the better – is a wonderful alternative to fescue and bluegrass. The goal should be to convert enough of your lawn to native gardens that you can sell your rider and get a push mower.



Urban native wildflower plantings require much less time and resources to maintain and attract birds and butterflies.

If you have a larger lot or multiple acres that you routinely maintain by mowing, consider converting much of it to a native prairie planting. While urban wildflower gardens will attract numerous songbirds and pollinating insects, larger suburban acreages converted to native vegetation have the potential to provide habitat for many more wildlife species. For example, your property may become the home for a covey of quail or a brood of turkeys.



Consider planting larger suburban acreages to native vegetation to attract wildlife and reduce mowing.

Benefits of Native Landscaping

Benefits of landscaping with natives include spending less time mowing, little if any fertilizer or chemicals required, providing habitat for wildlife from songbirds, butterflies and bees to quail, turkey and deer. Maintenance is still required, whether a wildflower garden or larger prairie restoration planting, however the maintenance practices are generally much less intensive and in some instances may provide a small economic return.

This article is intended to only highlight the tremendous expenditure of economic and natural resources required to maintain our lawns and the alternative practice of converting to native vegetation. More information on establishment techniques and plant species selection can be found by searching the internet and contacting your local Private Land Conservationist.

Burning for Bob

Andrew White, Quail Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist, Livingston, Linn and Carroll Counties



A common misconception amongst landowners is that fire, in general, is bad. While burning under the wrong conditions could potentially turn into a bad situation, for wildlife biologists and landowners alike, this is one of the best management tools we can use. Prescribed fire is ideal for manipulating a rank and overgrown landscape into a pristine early-successional landscape, which, my friends, is the type of cover sought out by none other than our state game bird, the Northern Bobwhite Quail. Burning at the appropriate time can greatly benefit the overall health of your property and the wildlife that inhabit it. Depending on the timing of your burn, you can really turn a *Habitat Dud* into a *Habitat Stud*! Learning the do's and don'ts is just the beginning, actually getting

out there and putting fire on the ground is what really matters.

Weather is the number one factor that determines how your prescribed burn will act. When burning, keep in mind that as your temperature goes up, your humidity drops. Burning in low humidity can cause spot-overs and can cause erratic fire behavior. Relative humidity should be between 25 and 60 percent. Wind is another influencing factor. Obviously you aren't going to be burning in steady winds of 20 mph with gusts up to 45 mph. Ideally, winds (at mid-flame height) should be between 5 and 15 mph. That also includes your gust speeds in that range, so be mindful of that.



Below are seasonal times to burn, with specifications for burning and benefits to our friend, Mr. Bobwhite.

Spring Burns (March 1-May15):

- Set back cool season grasses (CSG)
- Control woody invasion
- Thicken poor stands of WSG

Summer Burns (July 15-Sept 15):

- Set back thick stands of WSG.
- Control woody invasion
- Stimulate forb growth

Fall Burns (Sept 16-Nov15):

- Control woody invasion in warm season grasses (WSG)
- Stimulate forb growth in WSG
- Set back WSG dominance

Winter Burns (Nov 16-Feb 28):

- Seedbed preparation for interseeding legumes/forbs into WSG
- Stimulate forb growth in WSG
- Set back WSG dominance

Performing prescribed burning at different times of the year can have a large influence on the dynamic of your habitat. Your goals as a land manager and what outcomes you would like to see, will help you

determine the correct time of year to carry out a prescribed burn. Remember to not burn the entire field, only burning 1/3 of each field being managed in a 3 year rotation is best. As you put these burn units into rotation, you will have 3 things in each field: nesting cover, brood rearing cover, and escape cover. Having these can greatly increase your chances of gaining “bobs” on your property. If they are already there, this will help strengthen the population you already have, turning your property into a “Habitat Stud.” Carrying out prescribed burns not only benefits quail, but a whole host of upland wildlife we see here in Missouri. When you manage for quail, you’re managing for everything else.

No doubt about it, prescribed fire belongs on the landscape. Prescribed burning is noticeably less intense than a wildfire, but the response from plant and animal life can be quite dramatic! Using this great tool to manage your property can seem like a daunting task, but with the proper gear, crew, and a burn plan, it can really be rather simple.

To mitigate the limiting factors associated with prescribed fire, Quail Forever in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Conservation, the National Wild Turkey Federation and Doolittle Trailers, have put together Prescribed Burn Associations (PBA). Currently there are three active PBAs associated with Quail Forever across the state. They are based out of Livingston (Grand River PBA), Monroe (Mark Twain PBA), and Franklin (East Central PBA) Counties and have the ability to serve their surrounding counties. These PBAs help landowners by supplying the man power, training, and equipment necessary to put prescribed fire back on the Missouri landscape.

Quail Forever Biologists throughout the state are here to help. We are all certified burn plan specialists and can develop a plan specifically for your property, with your goals in mind. Contact your local QF Biologist or MDC Private Lands Conservationist today to get your plan started! Prescribed burning equipment can be obtained by contacting your local SWCD office, or local MDC office. Additional assistance and equipment can be found by joining your local Prescribed Burn Association.

Bee Ridge Quail Focus Area - 2016 Fall Whistle Count Summary

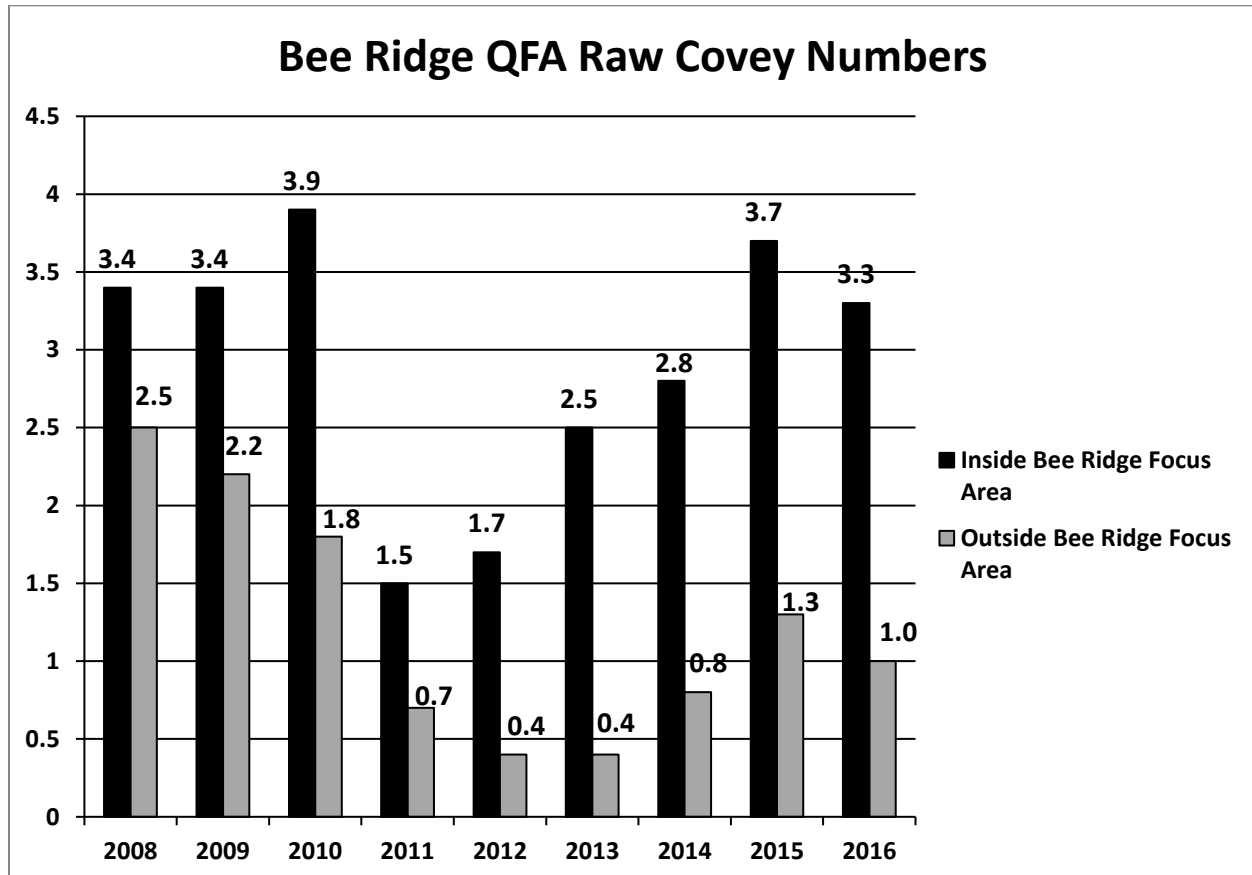
John Pinkowski, Private Lands Conservationist and Beth Emmerich, Resource Scientist

The Missouri Department of Conservation began establishing Quail Focus Areas (QFAs) on private lands in 2004. The idea behind QFAs is to increase and expand quail management efforts at a larger scale. Since the majority of Missouri’s landscape is in private ownership (93%), habitat improvement programs on private lands have greater potential to impact statewide quail populations than on public lands alone. Staff identified areas where landowners were already managing for quail or had expressed interest managing their land for quail. MDC staff work with landowners to improve quail habitat by providing technical and financial assistance in the focus areas. Some of the practices landowners are implementing include adding or improving woody cover (edge feathering, downed tree structures, shrub plantings, thinning of overstocked timbers), warm and cool-season grass renovation (prescribed fire, disking, herbicide treatment), adding food plots, and installing native warm-season grass and wildflowers in whole fields, odd areas and as field borders around crop fields.

We have been conducting fall covey count surveys in the Bee Ridge Focus Area (located in Knox County) since 2008. We count all coveys heard on 20 points located within the focus area and 20 points that are outside the focus area to compare quail numbers in areas where landowners are actively managing for quail versus areas that are not specifically managed for quail.

Last winter was warmer than normal with below average precipitation in northeast Missouri, so quail should have had good overwinter survival. Early spring weather was cooler and wet, then hot and dry in June. July was ranked as the 8th wettest on record, but most of the precipitation missed northeast Missouri and August continued the wet trends across most of the state. Despite less than ideal nesting conditions, cooperating landowners reported routinely seeing and hearing birds throughout the nesting season.

This fall, we heard an average of 3.3 coveys per point inside the focus area (an 11% decrease from 2015) compared to only 1.0 coveys per point outside the focus area (a 23% decrease from 2015). The slight decline in the focus area is nothing to worry about, and could be related to less than ideal conditions for conducting fall covey surveys. Numbers were highest in the focus area in 2010, at 3.9 coveys per point, but the Groundhog Day Blizzard in 2011 knocked numbers down in both sets of points. Notice the increase in numbers since 2011 inside the focus area compared to the numbers outside the focus area. This helps illustrate the point that quail can recover from serious weather events, given ample quality habitat.



MDC and private landowners provide new public hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing areas

Hunters, anglers, and wildlife viewers now have access to new outdoor locations through the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP). MRAP lands are privately owned properties in which the landowner voluntarily agrees to permit public access. In return, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) provides the landowner with annual incentive payments and habitat improvement assistance. To promote quality outdoor experiences, MRAP land must meet minimum habitat requirements.

Approximately 6,300 acres are currently enrolled in the program and open to the public. MRAP properties range in size from a few to several hundred acres, and they offer varying types of outdoor recreation. Participating landowners determine the activities that may occur on their land by selecting one of the public access options offered by the program. These options include 1) All Access Hunting

and Fishing, 2) Small Game and Turkey Hunting, 3) Youth Only Hunting and Fishing, 4) Archery Hunting, 5) Fishing, and 6) Wildlife Viewing Only.

MRAP properties are open to foot traffic only, and area users are asked to self-register at the designated parking and entry points. All rules and regulations enforced by MDC apply on MRAP lands. To learn more, visit the MDC-MRAP webpage at mdc.mo.gov/mrap. There you can find maps of enrolled properties, public access options, rules and procedures, and enrollment information for landowners.

New Quail Forever Farm Bill Biologist

Jake Swafford is the newest Quail Forever Partnership Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist. He is headquartered out of the Bethany USDA Field Office.

Jake has worked as a Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist with Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever since 2012 out of Eastern New Mexico. Since starting with the organization, Jake has worked with local farmers and ranchers to achieve habitat goals for many species of wildlife, including deer, quail, and lesser prairie chickens. Because of the partnerships involved with the position, he's had the opportunity to work with many local conservation organizations, providing wildlife expertise and promoting teamwork among the partners.

Originally from Columbia, Missouri; Jake grew up in an avid outdoor family. His favorite activities included deer hunting, hiking and spending weekends canoeing local streams with his father. Through his time outdoors, Jake found he had a passion for wildlife. He went on to earn a dual bachelor's degree in Forestry and Fisheries & Wildlife from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

While in school, Jake worked for Missouri Department of Conservation on research teams that gathered data on river otter populations in the Missouri Ozarks and prairie chicken populations in northwest Missouri. Upon graduation, he worked as a wildlife resource aide for the Missouri Department of Conservation, which gave him the opportunity to gain hands-on wildlife and land management experience. We are excited to add Jake's skill set to our conservation team in Missouri.

Jake can be reached at jswafford@quailforever.org or (573) 881-1224.

This American Land: Bobwhites on the Brink

"Bobwhites on the Brink" is a five-segment series on the syndicated public television show This American Land, now in its sixth season and available to public TV outlets around the country. The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, with the help of states, worked over a period of months with show producers to tell the "big story" behind the precipitous decline of the northern bobwhite and a suite of grassland songbirds and other wildlife species. The segments specifically examine how changes in the way we raise our crops, graze our cattle and manage our forests has pushed bobwhites and other wildlife species off the American landscape, and what can be done to make room for them once again. The links to the episodes are as follows:

Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHgE7S7XfwA>
Episode 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RIqceJX0Os
Episode 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c-vFtl225E>
Episode 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VQJ6CP2VSw>
Episode 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCIqYjm6bhY>

NBCI Issues 6th ‘State of the Bobwhite’ Report

A new campaign to support using native grasses in federally-subsidized conservation programs on agricultural lands and the creation of a new technical website tailored to the needs of state biologists for reporting and analyzing habitat assessment and bobwhite/songbird monitoring results are among but a few of the highlights in the 6th State of the Bobwhite Report 2016 from the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI).

The 66-page annual report also examines a creative approach in Arkansas for monitoring a bobwhite focal area at Pea Ridge National Battlefield, the new relationship between NBCI and the U.S. Forest Service and what it means for bobwhite restoration on national forests, as well as delving into an enormous amount of bobwhite research being conducted in Oklahoma. Also included are reports from states on their accomplishments in bobwhite conservation.

Check out “NBCI’s Bobwhite Almanac, State of the Bobwhite 2016” on the NBCI website at <http://bringbackbobwhites.org/download/nbcis-bobwhite-almanac-state-of-the-bobwhite-2016/>.

About NBCI

Headquartered at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture’s Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, NBCI is an initiative of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC) to elevate bobwhite quail recovery from an individual state-by-state proposition to a coordinated, range-wide leadership endeavor. The committee is comprised of representatives of 25 state wildlife agencies, various academic research institutions and private conservation organizations. Support for NBCI is provided by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program, state wildlife agencies, the Joe Crafton Family Endowment for Quail Initiatives, the University of Tennessee and Park Cities Quail. For more information, please visit www.bringbackbobwhites.org and find us on Facebook, YouTube and Slideshare.

Mark Your Calendar

NWSG Grazing Workshop and Farm Tour - MDC, NRCS, MU Extension, US Fish & Wildlife Service and Pheasants/Quail Forever will be putting on a collaborative workshop focused on cattle producers in SW MO. The workshop will focus on WSG establishment and management, soil health benefits and the economic benefits of incorporating WSG into producer’s pastures. The date is Saturday, March 4th, 2017 from 10am-3pm in Greenfield, MO. Specific site location TBD. Lunch provided. Limited to 30 participants. RSVP required by February 20th. Contact Landry Jones 417-326-5189 x1848 to RSVP or if you have questions.

Winter Covey Headquarter Calendar

January

Dormant seed monarch/pollinator mixes now through February
Order your covey headquarter shrubs from the MDC nursery through April
Sign up for MRAP through January 17th visit mdc.mo.gov/mrap

February

Interseed wildflowers/legumes in conjunction with your CRP management practices. Cost share is available from USDA.
Broadcast annual lespedeza over recently burned areas and firelines.
Create covey headquarters by dropping large trees along fencerows and leave them where they fall.
Finish burning your native warm-season grass acres this month. For quail, DO NOT burn rank stands of native grass after March 15.
Cut, Cut, Cut – continue your edge feathering projects, this will result in cover at ground level for your quail.

USDA Releases Additional SAFE acres

USDA is adding an additional 1.1 million acres to a number of key CRP practices that are critically important to wildlife and conservation. These include 700,000 acres for State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) efforts, which restore high-priority wildlife habitat tailored to a specific state's needs. In addition to SAFE, 300,000 acres will be added to target wetlands restoration that are nature's water filters and 100,000 acres for pollinator habitat that support 30 percent of agricultural production.

The SAFE program allows participants to enroll entire fields or partial fields, including field borders and contour buffer strips. Participants will be required to establish at least 10 percent of the contract in food plots and provide edge-feathering or covey-headquarter shrub plantings. Native grass mixes with wildflowers must be established. In return, USDA provides signup incentives, up to 90% cost-share of installing the practice, and an annual soil rental payment for 10 years.

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.



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